Child and Family Services Update

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Utah's Post Adoption Support Three-Year Plan: Evaluation Of Year One

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Executive Summary

The objective of this report is to summarize Utah's progress to date at the end of the first year of a comprehensive three-year plan to improve post adoption services for children placed and supported by the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS). A utilization-focused *Evaluation of Post Adoption Support in Utah*--funded by the U.S. Children's Bureau and conducted independently by the University of Utah Social Research Institute--provides a voice for adoptive parents and service professionals in the post adoption system, and provides direction for policy and programming developments in the three-year plan.

In developing the Three-Year Post Adoption Plan, DCFS and its partnering agencies collaboratively established seven specific goals with a total of twenty-four concrete objectives for year one. At the end of the year, nineteen of those objectives have been accomplished, two more have been accomplished but are in need of ongoing effort, and the remaining two are in progress and nearing completion.

As part of the plan, a statewide assessment of available services was completed. Fourteen assessment meetings were held statewide. These meetings increased awareness of adoption issues and facilitated networking among parents and professionals on the local level. The most notable gaps in service identified through this process include a lack of respite care for difficult to manage children and a lack of residential treatment centers available in many areas of the state.

The *Evaluation of Post Adoption Support* in Utah gathered data on parents' and professionals' perceptions of the various systems that serve adoptive families, and on their suggestions for the improvement of these systems, and the development of new services, on a statewide basis and in their local communities. Mailed surveys received from 426 parents indicated that parents' lack of awareness of both pre-existing and newly developed post adoption services remains a barrier to their accessing and receiving support.

Twelve focus groups made it clear that each of Utah's communities has its own unique perceptions, assets, challenges, and needs for change in post adoption support; and that all areas of the state share a significant need for improvement in the collaboration of service providers and in the adoption competence of collateral support systems.

Qualitative interviews with parents also began this year. Preliminary results suggest that competent support from DCFS caseworkers, mental health professionals, and educational systems makes a critical contribution to the success of special needs adoption. Contrarily, a lack of adoption competence and responsiveness by these

providers contributes to parents feeling overwhelmed and unable to meet the challenges they face in raising their adopted children.

The following recommendations are derived from the evaluation:
- ➢ Clearly identify the post adoption support contact in each DCFS region of the state and provide dedicated time for these workers to respond to adoptive families in crisis.
- ➢ Further the development of parent-to-parent support networks. Make these networking opportunities flexible and accommodating for parents who are unable to participate in on-site parent groups (i.e. facilitate mentoring, phone contact, on-line chats, etc.).
- ➢ Continue to support the mental health system's efforts to increase its adoption competency.
- ➢ Support the education system's understanding of and responsiveness to the needs of special needs adoptive children and their families.
- ➢ Address the critical need for both scheduled and crisis respite care throughout the state.
- ➢ Increase opportunities for collaboration among multidisciplinary service providers who serve adoptive families.
- ➢ Empower local regions to address their unique needs for post adoption service development and improvement.
- ➢ Increase adoptive families' awareness of and access to services that have recently been developed.